Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae* L. (Lep.: Lycaenidae) – unusual egg clusters, myths and misconceptions

In all of the older books that I referred to concerning egg-laying by the Brown Hairstreak, it says that the eggs are laid *singly* in the angle formed by a thorn and the stem on Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. This myth is perpetuated in several of the more recent publications. Exceptions are the works of Jeremy Thomas. In Thomas & Lewington (1991, *The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland*) it states that it is not unusual to find two, three or even four eggs on the same twig (see illustration on p. 61 of that work where two eggs are shown fairly close together near a fork in a blackthorn stem) and by Heath, Pollard and Thomas (1984, *Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland*, Viking Press) who state that the eggs are laid in "ones and twos". Emmet and Heath (1989, *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 7, part 1. Harley Books) state that eggs are sometimes found in twos and threes.

However, whilst searching for eggs of the Brown Hairstreak over the last two years, as part of the *Butterflies for the New Millennium* map, I have come across several occurrences of multiple eggs that enable the above statements to be amplified.

More than one egg along the same twig, but not in contact, are common. Pairs of eggs in contact occur in the ratio of 1 in 20 (3 in 61 sightings) as recorded by myself and Maurice Edmonds over the last two years: 1.5m from the ground on an east-north-east-facing hedge (SS 779035) in the fork of a one-year-old offshoot on a three-year-old stem on 9 December 1996; on a west-south-west-facing hedge about 1.4m from the ground (SX 699883) on 5 January 1997, and on a south-south-east-facing hedge on 11 January 1997 (SS 781033).

On 15 January 1996, just south of Upton Pyne, Devon, I came across a cluster of three eggs arranged in a tight equilateral triangle in the fork of a one-year old offshoot from a two-year old stem of Blackthorn (SX 907967), I had previously spent about 40 minutes searching a 200m length of an east-south-east facing hedge to no avail. The eggs were about 0.6m off the ground; there was one other egg close by, but then I stopped searching. Amongst other Devon recorders with whom I have discussed my findings, Maurice Edmonds found three eggs arranged as described above in 1994 and Graham Madge informs me that occasionally he has found three eggs together (see below).

My best-ever find, however, was four eggs together on a west-south-west-facing hedge about 1.5m from the ground (SX 694879) on 5 January 1997. In this last example, three eggs were arranged in a straight line, all touching, with the fourth egg just above and separated from the median egg. In 1996, Graham Madge recorded a female laying an egg at the apex of an equilateral triangle of three eggs. Simon Mitchell has on one occasion found four eggs

together and they were arranged in contact like a chain – one up, one down, one up, one down. The ultimate record, however, is that of Tony Hawtin who found five eggs within a diameter of 1.2cm, with a sixth egg 1.5cm away and another 4.5cm away on 11 November 1987.

The question is, are these multiple occurrences the eggs of one butterfly, or of separate butterflies? Graham Madge observed that in the "four-egg situation" noted above, the female fluttered about and alighted briefly here and there, before crawling in behind some leaves near the base of the hedge and remained there for a few seconds. She then re-emerged, flew to the top of the hedge and disappeared. To him, it seemed as though the female deliberately selected the egg-laying spot as if she already knew that it was a highly favourable site.

Further previously unrecorded observations on Brown Hairstreak egg laying include a single egg on a 1cm thick stem of blackthorn found by myself on 3 February 1997. Maurice Edmonds notes that occasionally eggs can be found *under* the blackthorn fork. Maurice has also found eggs laid on a honeysuckle stem entwined around blackthorn.

North Devon is commonly stated (eg. Emmet and Heath, *op. cit.*) to be the stronghold of the Brown Hairstreak in Devon. This is certainly not true since at least the 1960s (see distribution map in Bristow, Mitchell and Bolton (1993, *Devon Butterflies,* Devon Books)), nor borne out by the recent recording for the *Millennium Atlas.* Searches by Kevin Bastow and Graham Madge in North Devon during the last two years were mostly unsuccessful. The major stronghold is mid-Devon – eggs have been recorded by Graham Madge and myself on every tetrad (well over 100 tetrads) within a radius of 14km of my house (SS 7703).

Finally, Stainton (1857, *A Manual of British Butterflies and Moths,* London) notes that larvae also feed on Birch *Betula alba.* I must admit that I have never looked for the eggs on birch and know no one who has seen the female egg laying on this tree. I assume that Stainton's record is erroneous. – C.R. Bristow, Davidsland, Copplestone, Devon EX17 5NX.

A precisely timed case of nocturnal migration by *Aeshna cyanea* (Müller) (Odonata: Aeshnidae)

Migrating dragonflies are not infrequently recorded at lighthouses and in m.v. light-traps used for trapping moths. However, there is very little information on the time of arrival of such individuals at light and thus the time of night that migration occurs. For this reason the following instance is of interest.

During the night of 2-3 August 1996, I was running a mains-operated m.v. moth-trap in a garden on a housing estate in the village of Tarvin in Cheshire, VC58 (OS Grid reference SJ 4866). As numerous guests were staying overnight in the house and the night was fine and overcast, I pitched